DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 456 048 SO 030 792

AUTHOR	Byrum, Andrea
TITLE	Change in Mexico: Problems and Promise. Curriculum Project. Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminars Abroad Program, 1993 (Mexico).
SPONS AGENCY	Center for International Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1993-00-00
NOTE	20p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Area Studies; *Change; Curriculum Development; *Economics; Foreign Countries; Global Approach; High Schools; Higher Education; *Political Science; *Religion
IDENTIFIERS	Fulbright Hays Seminars Abroad Program; Mexican Culture; *Mexican Literature; *Mexico

ABSTRACT

This curriculum unit presents an overview of change in Mexico. The unit is not meant to be an in-depth study, but rather a survey of four areas traditionally important in Mexican life: the economy, politics, religion, and literature, with particular emphasis on the first two. The unit is designed as a module on contemporary Mexico in a Latin American civilization course for college majors in Spanish and international relations but could also be used in any university or high school course as a unit on contemporary Mexico. The unit details teaching strategies, lists materials, and includes lectures, discussion questions, and activity suggestions. (Contains 10 notes and an 11-item bibliography.) (BT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 456 048

CHANGE IN MEXICO:
PROBLEMS AND PROMISE

by
Andrea Byrum

Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminars Abroad Program, 1993 (Mexico)

Curriculum Project

SO 030 792

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Andrea Byrum
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Fulbright Summer Abroad Program 1993

CURRICULUM PROJECT

CHANGE IN MEXICO: PROBLEMS AND PROMISE

Andrea Byrum
Professor of Spanish
Edgewood College

Objectives: Based on the 1993 Fulbright Summer Seminar entitled "Mexico-Towards the 21st Century: Issues on Recent Developments in Mexican Political, Social, Economic, and Cultural Life," this curriculum unit presents an overview of change in Mexico. It is not meant to be an in-depth study, but rather a survey of four areas traditionally important in Mexican life: the economy, politics, religion, and literature, with particular emphasis on the first two. It is designed as a module on contemporary Mexico in a Latin American Civilization course for my college's Spanish and International Relations majors. It could be used in any university or high school course wanting a unit on contemporary Mexico. There are also slides and a slide script of scenes from the Fulbright trip.

Strategies: Students read or hear lectures based on the synopses of the Mexican economy, politics, religion, and literature. They then do follow-up discussion activities; these could also be used as an evaluation tool. Students can view the slides as a visual aid. The instructor or students may wish to do more research on topics of particular interest.

Materials: The summaries are based on the Fulbright seminar lectures and other activities carried out in Mexico the summer of 1993. They also include information from research and readings I did in the U.S. before and after the trip. The exploratory activities after each section are to promote discussion or to serve as possible test questions. The slides highlight scenes of Mexico shot during the summer of 1993. A bibliography cites sources for further research.

INTRODUCTION

While sharing characteristics of other Latin American countries, Mexico has always been a unique country, following its own path of development. This is especially true of Mexico's recent history as it enters the final years of the 20th century. The country is undergoing radical change in its economy and significant transformation in its socio-political and cultural spheres as well.

Mexico is definitely in transition, with an expanding economy and a more diverse population. Yet no one knows the final outcome of the changes. This formative period in Mexican history must be studied carefully to see how the country developed from the past and to surmise where it will go in the future.

Having had the opportunity to study Mexico first hand through the Fulbright Summer Seminar, I view the Mexico of 1993 as one of problems and promise. The changes occurring have created new problems as Mexicans try to adjust to the transformations, while old problems remain unsolved or exacerbated. Still there is a sense of great hope amongst some Mexicans and analysts that the present holds the promise of a better future. What is happening now will determine the Mexico of the 2lst century.

This curriculum unit will present a panorama of change in four significant areas of Mexican life -- the economy, politics, church and state relations, and literature -- as a barometer of the problems and promise in the Mexico of the late 20th century.

Presentation of each area should begin with a discussion of what students already know about the field. Then students should read or hear lectures on the overviews of each area. Finally, the activities I suggest or others created by the instructor will hopefully motivate students to explore more about a Mexico moving ahead in its unique way.

THE ECONOMY

If ten years ago someone had suggested that Mexico would be negotiating a free trade agreement with the United States and Canada, most people would have said it was impossible. This is an indication of the radical changes that have transformed the Mexican economy, especially under the Salinas administration. It is in the economic sphere that the most extreme and arguably the most successful changes in Mexican life have occurred.

Changes in the economy have unleashed reactions and disruptions in every sphere of Mexican life as Mexicans have struggled to adjust.

To understand the full significance of the Mexican economy as of 1993, one must set it in the context of recent history. The economic model followed in most of the 20th century in Mexico was the import substitution model. Mexico had a protectionist market, with high trade barriers protecting Mexican domestic products. With the oil boom of the 1970's, the Mexican economy was seemingly on the right course, as foreign banks were eager to grant huge loans. When oil prices plummeted, however, the Mexican economy was left in disarray. The economy became stagnant, with huge inflation and a foreign debt which Mexico could not even service.

With mounting pressure internally, and externally from the International Monetary Fund, in 1983-85, Mexico saw that it had to drastically change its economic model. It went from being one of the most protected to one of the most open markets in the world, from a statist to a market economy. The government redefined its social and economic role. It reduced its import duties, renegotiated its foreign debt, privatized its state-owned industries, and changed its major export from oil to manufacturing. It slashed government spending and negotiated pacts with business and labor regarding wages and salaries.

A key feature was modernization through internationalization. Mexico wanted to attract foreign investment and ownership, unheard of in the old Mexico when 51% of ownership had to be Mexican. Maquiladoras were built; these foreign-owned assembly plants on the U.S./Mexican border had their input imported duty-free and their output exported at a low rate.

The result was dramatically lower inflation, down to single digit by 1992, and better control of their trade deficit. The economy had been stabilized.

Some would argue, however, that this stabilization was carried out with a high social cost for the average Mexican: low salaries, high unemployment, and special hardship for small to medium businesses and peasants.

In the government's view, Nafta or the Tratado de libre comercio, as it is called in Spanish, was the next logical step in its economic reform. It felt Mexico must compete in the world economy, that world trade would mean progress and jobs, that increased production would bring higher wages. With the extra income, the government could fund social, labor, and environmental programs. Indeed, the Salinas administration laid its political future on the line betting that Nafta would be approved by all parties.

The trade agreement has been controversial both in Mexico and the U.S. Objectively speaking, it would eliminate all barriers to trade, promote conditions for fair competition, increase investment opportunity, and establish dispute

resolution procedures. Becoming effective on January 1, 1994, it would create the largest trading bloc in the world, with 360 million consumers.

When I was in Mexico the summer of 1993, the trade agreement was a national obsession, the object of discussion much earlier than in the U.S. Most of us are familiar with the pro and con arguments in the U.S., but perhaps do not know the Mexican view. The Mexican people were not allowed to participate directly in the decision to approve or not approve the agreement. The Mexican Senate, with 61 of its 64 seats controlled by the ruling political party PRI, would most certainly approve it in November 93. Yet Mexicans talked about it a lot when I was there, with diverse viewpoints. In general, I found most Mexicans to be apprehensive about it, asking themselves if Mexico could compete in a global market, if Mexico would lose jobs and whole industries, especially in agriculture and the small business sector. In the Zócalo in Mexico City, we saw protesters representing certain labor groups camped out in protest against Nafta. Yet ironically, many Mexicans who feared Nafta also hoped it would mean greater future prosperity. They had come through some tough economic times already and felt that now there was at least the possibility of better times ahead.

Some sectors, however, saw it as a "sell-out" to international interests, bringing up the traditional Mexican fear of overdependence on the U.S. Some saw Nafta as a threat to Mexican cultural identity while others wondered how the U.S. government could in effect be approving an undemocratic Mexican government by approving Nafta.

Some of the left-wing political opposition felt that the lack of democracy should be a topic in Nafta negotiations and that Mexican interests were not being sufficiently protected. Some of the right-wing political opposition said that the government was relying too heavily on Nafta and hoped Mexico would also seek trade with the rest of Latin America. Other analysts focused on the geopolitical interests involved in Nafta, interpreting the U.S.'s desire for the treaty as a protection of its strategic interests in having a "stable", PRI-governed neighbor to the south.[1]

It has been interesting to note the Mexican reaction to the vigorous debate in November 1993 while the U.S. Congress considered its adoption. This stirred debate in Mexico also, as Salinas was embarrassed to admit the U.S. might not approve it and his critics relished the negative comments about his administration from certain U.S. sectors. After the Perot-Gore debate in the U.S., Jaime Serra Puche, Minister of Trade, even offered to debate opposition candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas over it, but the latter said it was pointless.

In both the U.S. and Mexico, the major controversy was over jobs--would there be more won or lost in each country?

Thus, the astounding, fundamental changes in Mexican economic life present problems, as Mexicans worry about displaced workers. There is special concern for the small-scale agricultural workers who will not be able to compete, especially now that a new policy allows for the buying and selling of the ejidos, communally owned land. During the summer of 1993, we even heard talk of "nutritional sovereignty" as Mexicans would now depend on U.S. corn imported into Mexico. Even a government representative admitted to us that there will be Mexican sectors which will suffer, but the government believes that over all the economy will become stronger.[2]

Thus, the promise of a better future is also a big part of Nafta. Yet most analysts believe the gains will take time to develop, and the big question is how long Mexican society will wait to see some of the prosperity trickle down to a larger segment of the population. Will there be a ruptura, a social explosion, if needs are not met?

The government's future attention to social concerns will largely be determined by the next president who will begin to serve in 1994. The economic and political spheres are intertwined, as will be shown in the next section.

Also, in the future it will be interesting to follow the dynamics of the new phase of U.S./Mexican relations ushered in by Nafta. Though it is difficult to predict the outcome, the two countries are bound together and will influence each other as never before, in economic and other spheres.

Activities on the Economy:

1. As a comprehension check:
    a. True/False:
        1. ____ Mexico has gone from being one of the most protected to one of the most open markets.
        2. ____ Privatization and internationalization are key features of Mexico's economic model under President Salinas.
        3. ____ Results of the new economic model are stabilization, higher wages, and more success for small and medium size businesses.
        4. ____ The Mexican government sees Nafta as the next logical step in its economic reform.
        5. ____ Nafta eliminates trade barriers only between two countries, the U.S. and Mexico.
        6. ____ Nafta will form the largest trading bloc in the world.

2. Exploratory activities:
    a. Students divide into two groups to debate the pros and cons of Nafta. Or this could be done as a written essay by individual students.
    b. Students role play a round table discussion on Nafta by various interested parties: workers from Mexico and the U.S., environmental groups, the presidents of Mexico and the U.S., Ross Perot, etc.
    c. Students divide into four groups and make up ten questions on the Mexican economy for the opposing groups.
    d. Students write an essay on the difficulties caused by such a radical change in economic policy as that experienced by Mexico.
    e. After doing research, students discuss the economies of other Latin American countries and their possible entry into Nafta.
    f. Each student writes an essay on the various Mexican viewpoints towards Nafta and the new economy.

POLITICS

Mexico's political system of the 20th century has always been unique and difficult to categorize. Is it "semi-authoritarian", or "the perfect dictatorship" as Vargas Llosa once said? However it is defined, one must understand Mexican politics in order to understand contemporary Mexico because so much of Mexican life is determined by politics.

The key questions being asked by analysts are these: will the liberalization seen in Mexican economic policy carry over into politics, will there be an apertura or "opening" in the political system, and is Mexico truly in a process of democratization?[3]

To answer these questions and to comprehend contemporary Mexican politics, it is necessary to survey how its unique political system was formed in the past.[4]

Modern Mexico begins with the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920. As key sectors fought to rid the country of its ruling oligarchy, new political chieftains or caudillos arose. One of these authoritarian figures was named Calles, and in 1929 he founded the PNR, the Revolutionary National Party, to unite diverse revolutionary groups and to concentrate power in one single political party which would represent all their interests. President Lázaro Cárdenas ruled from 1934-1940, contributing to the presidencialismo or strong presidential power every Mexican president has enjoyed since. In 1938, the PNR became the PRM, the Mexican Revolutionary Party, establishing the corporatist structure of labor, peasants, middle class, and the army. 1940-1955 saw the consolidation of the Mexican political system, with one ruling party and a president firmly in control. 1946 was the year the party changed its name to PRI, the Partido revolucionario institucional or Institutional Revolutionary Party. This seemingly contradictory name suggested that the revolution was in permanent evolution until all its goals were met.

Thus evolved the "two pillars" of the Mexican political system: PRI and the president. PRI is unique in that it represents a political party and the state itself. From 1929 to 1990, PRI has won every election for president and all state governorships. The Mexican president is also part of the authoritarian political system: he is head of state, head of the government and foreign policy and the economy. He controls how party members vote in the lower and upper legislative houses and chooses the party's presidential candidate, who has always gone on to become the next president.

However, even this time-honored political system is beginning to change. A key indicator was the 1988 presidential election, which represented a major transition in Mexican politics. There were three major parties running. PRI had as its candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who had worked in the de la Madrid administration. The FDN, the National Democratic Front, was a new coalition of left-wing groups and had as its candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the son of a former president. PAN, the Partido de acción nacional or National Action Party, was a conservative party that named Manuel Clouthier as its candidate. The official tally from the government, which counts the votes, was as follows: PRI 51%, FDN 31%, PAN 17%. There were many irregularities in the vote tabulation, with a supposed computer crash.

Many Mexicans, outraged by the blatant irregularities in the vote-counting, think Cárdenas actually won. Most analysts have concluded that Salinas probably did win, but with a margin of victory over Cárdenas much smaller than the official tally shows.[5]

This election is precedent-setting. Even Carlos Salinas said afterwards, "The era of the virtual one-party system in Mexico has ended." A number of first-time events occurred: For the first time in history, a Mexican president was elected either with less than half the votes cast or with a bare majority; for the first time, a PRI presidential candidate failed to carry whole states and the Federal District; for the first time, PRI no longer had a 2/3 majority in the Chamber of Deputies; for the first time since the 1929 founding of PRI, opposition candidates were elected to the Senate (4 of 64 seats).[6]

Significant changes in electoral behavior appeared, as a new left-of-center party and a long-time right-wing party mounted a creditable opposition to the long-standing PRI hegemony.

This trend is irreversible. The old political system seems outmoded. More urban and better informed, Mexicans are growing tired of "politics as usual" and want their vote to be counted fairly.

Thus, the Mexican political system of 1993 is different than before. The Salinas sexenio from 1988 to 1994 has seen six years of important change, often change by demand. The ruling elite of PRI is now made up of the "technocrats" or técnicos, and not the "politicians" or políticos of before. Significantly, the latter group, which opposes reform, is called the "dinosaurs". Changes in the constitution, a viable opposition, and a more vigilant citizenry are proofs of real transformation. A computer network of citizens is being assembled to monitor the 94 elections.

Mexico is indeed in a process of democratization. Historically, there is more democracy than before, as evidenced by the opposition parties running and winning. The FDN has reorganized into the PRD, the Democratic Revolutionary Party. Its representatives and PAN representatives are already working hard on the '94 presidential and other local elections. Yet the following also needs to take place for full democracy to be reached: a decrease in presidential power, a fairer electoral process, a change in the authoritarian political culture, and more citizen participation.

There is some risk of destabilization in all this. Salinas, in particular, must keep a delicate balance. Even though he won the election under a cloud, he has attained a degree of popularity through the much-touted Solidarity Program (a boot straps social program), some anti-corruption policies, and a high degree of public visibility. He must balance reform with control, as pressures mount inside and outside of PRI. To placate Mexicans tired of electoral fraud, the government has recently launched a widely-publicized photo identification card campaign, though some Mexicans remain skeptical of its effectiveness. Salinas bet everything on Nafta and almost lost. But now that the U.S. has approved the agreement, it is a victory for Salinas and PRI and a setback for the opposition. The PRI representative we met said that the party realizes the challenge it faces and is changing its strategy to a regional focus and to choosing party candidates who can withstand competition.[7]

Most important, Salinas has to choose carefully the next PRI presidential candidate. Will it be someone to continue the economic reform and/or someone

to address growing social concerns? Salinas has delayed the destape or "unveiling" of the candidate until after the U.S. congressional vote on Nafta. The candidates are Pedro Aspe, Minister of Finance; Manuel Camacho Solís, the Mayor of Mexico City; Luis Donaldo Colosio, Secretary for Social Development; and Ernesto Zedillo, Secretary of Education.[8]

In conclusion, the political system in 1993 has problems of credibility and integrity, yet there is real movement toward democracy and hope for a better future. As Mexico opens itself economically, will there be more political opening? To a large extent, this will depend on how well organized the opposition is, how open to reform the ruling PRI is, and how much demand is exerted by the Mexican people. The presidential elections of 1994 and elections for governors and other local offices will be important indicators.

Activities on Politics:

1. As a comprehension check,
    a. ask students to identify the following people & terms: Carlos Salinas, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, Luis Donaldo Colosio, Manual Camacho Solís, el presidencialismo, el destape, un sexenio, técnicos versus políticos, PRI, PAN, and PRD
    b. have students describe the construction of Mexico's political system
    c. have students analyze the significance of the 1988 presidential election.
2. In a more creative vein,
    a. have students stage a debate between PRI, PRD, and PAN regarding key issues in the upcoming '94 elections
    b. have students do research on democratization in Latin America and how Mexico compares
    c. have students discuss the relationship between economic and political liberalization; is there necessarily any relationship between the two?
    d. have students formulate political questions or advice they would give the next president of Mexico.

RELIGION: CHURCH AND STATE RELATIONS

Church and state relations have always been revealing and often difficult throughout Mexican history.[9] A brief survey of this relationship will be another barometer of change.

Beginning with the Reform Laws of Benito Juárez in the 1860's, separation of church and state was established. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the Mexican Constitution of 1917 further separated the two institutions: the state recognized no religion, the church had no rights as organizations, and the clergy had no vote or political rights.

However, anyone who knows much about Mexico realizes that theory and practice are quite different on this issue. From the 1940's till the 1980's actual practice was that religious public activities were allowed even though they were against the constitution. In exchange, the Catholic Church did not interfere in politics.

Once again, there has been a significant change in official policy, one which is bound to have an impact on Mexican society in the future. From the 1980's until the present (1993), PRI could see that the opposition parties were negotiating with both Catholic and Protestant groups. Internationally, Mexico had a bad image on human rights. Therefore, in 1992, Salinas proposed and got approved new articles in the Constitution: complete recognition was given to all churches, with special rights to none; clergy can vote, but not hold political office. So the Catholic Church, in order to get rights for itself, allowed freedom to be given to other churches, especially Protestant groups which are growing stronger in Mexico. In exchange, the Catholic Church tacitly agreed to support the government. The Salinas government gave concessions to the Catholic Church, but also to other religious groups.

I view all this as the Mexican government being politically astute in adapting to the times and positioning itself in a politically favorable position. It is important to note the trend toward greater regional diversity in the area of religion and other fields. Several times this summer Mexican experts would refer to the three regions of Mexico (the north, center, and south) and the differences amongst them. The south is becoming less Catholic and more Protestant. Indeed, the Constitution, while giving the Catholic Church political power, also gives recognition and opens the country up to non-Catholics. Allowing churches to participate in politics is still a controversial issue being debated in the Mexican media.

Two other religious events have significance as well. In the last few years, after more than a century of estrangement, the Mexican government re-established diplomatic relations with the Vatican. This is a dramatic change from the past. Salinas, always with an eye on Mexico's international image, perhaps wanted to have the Vatican as an ally. Based on world events, maybe he saw as anachronistic the Mexican government's separation from such an important religious institution.

The other event was the 1993 assassination of the Cardinal of Guadalajara. This caused a national outrage as Mexicans were horrified to think such an important figure could be gunned down in a public airport at Mexico's second largest city. It created a credibility problem for the Salinas government as it tried to explain what happened. The official version said that it was a case of mistaken identity and accidental death, but there were rumors that local officials had either allowed or helped the assassins escape. The Vatican finally accepted the government's version, though some Mexican Catholic leaders did not. This could be seen as a test of the new church and state agreement, with the Catholic Church supporting the government's position. This incident raised the question of the government's ability to insure national security, an important issue in Mexico's future.

Thus, we see more political rights given to churches and more recognition of an increasingly diverse Mexican populace, but the implications of this new policy remain to be seen.

Activities on Church and State:

1. Students discuss the historical background of church and state relations in Mexico and how the new constitutional articles represent a change in these relations.
2. Students explain why the Mexican government re-established diplomatic relations with the Vatican.
3. Students analyze the significance of the assassination of the Guadalajara cardinal.

LITERATURE

Mexican writers of the 20th century have always held a mirror up to Mexican society to reflect its image and to ponder its deeper meaning. From Azuela's Los de abajo which portrayed the vagaries of the Mexican Revolution to Rulfo's picture of desolation and isolation in El llano en llamas to Fuentes' compromised post-revolutionary protagonist in La muerte de Artemio Cruz, the Mexican soul has been revealed and dissected by its writers.[10]

The trends of the 1980's and 90's show the Mexican literary scene to be as dynamic and far-seeing as ever. The transformations in Mexican society are being interpreted by such outstanding artists as José Agustín and Elena Poniatowska. As usual, this is being done through a wide variety of literary styles.

One interesting approach to contemporary Mexico is the historical novel, currently popular in Mexico. It seeks to learn about Mexico's present identity and what is happening now through a study of the recent past. Fernando del Paso's Noticias del imperio about the Maxmiliano and Carlota era is a good example, as is José Agustín's best seller Tragicomedia mexicana, historical chronicles covering up to 1982.

Another indication of literary change is the new trend of erotic literature, with Juan García Ponce's De ánima or Jaime de Palacio's Parejas.

Reflecting an interest in political and human rights themes are the so-called "detective novels", like Malú Cuacuja's Crímenes sin falta de ortografía on police brutality.

The growing influence of women is seen in the new group of women writers: Elena Poniatowska, with her current best seller Tinísima about an Italian journalist; María Luisa Puga and her Las posibilidades del odio and Antonia; Angeles Mastretta's Arráncame la vida about 1930's women of strong character; Laura Esquivel's famous Como agua para chocolate with its study of the culinary and sexual world of women; and Carmen Boullosa with her ecological novels and erotic style.

It is interesting, however, that Elena Poniatowska in a lecture to our group discussed how difficult it is for a Mexican female writer to find her own voice and gain respect from the male intellectual elite. She said that one of the strongest influences on her work has always come from the Mexican "people on the street."

Indiçative of the decentralization and regionalism Mexico is experiencing in many facets of its national life is the new urban novel which is being cultivated, about cities besides Mexico City. Examples are Jesús Gardea's Placeres and Luis Arturo Ramos' Erase un gato about a past U.S. invasion.

Enrique Serna is a young writer treating the problems of the 1980's and 1990's, and Juan Villoro in El disparo de Argón depicts the problems of Mexico City.

There has recently been a heightened interest by Mexicans in their own national literature. New editions of Mexican classics are being published by publishing houses noting the new Mexican reader is willing to buy such works. The cultural scene is dynamic, with lots of different groups springing up. There is, however, a cultural "establishment", composed of two opposing political groups which debate the democratization of literature amongst other things. This duel is played out in the opposing cultural magazines Vuelta (with Octavio Paz and other conservatives) and Nexos (of Carlos Fuentes and other liberals). Both groups have in some cases sided with the government, showing there is still control of culture by powerful groups. So literature and culture are at times politicized.

Perhaps more than any other field, contemporary Mexican literature reflects and analyzes the problems and promise of a country striving to enter the 21st century without sacrificing its inner soul.

Activities on Literature:

1. How do recent literary trends reflect the changes going on in Mexican society? Cite specific authors and titles as examples.
2. How do Mexican culture and literature sometimes become politicized?
3. Read a literary work of Elena Poniatowska or José Agustín and analyze how it reflects social concerns.

CONCLUSION

We have surveyed the major transitional period Mexico is experiencing. Economically, it is already embarked on a path toward first world status, yet it has many socio-economic concerns which must be addressed. Politically, there is some small "opening", but still a long way to go to reach full democracy and freedom of choice. The future of Mexico's political development depends on how its government responds to internal and external pressures for reform. Mexico's religious and literary culture are reflecting and interpreting the transformations in all spheres of Mexican life.

Forces of change have been unleashed. How much any government or group can control them remains to be seen. The only certain thing is that Mexico, ever unique and often unpredictable, will charter its own course into the 21st century. One can only hope that this country's great potential can be realized.

SLIDE SCRIPT

The 43 slides were taken by me during the Fulbright seminar in Mexico the summer of 1993. Each slide was chosen to highlight the changes occurring in Mexico or the mixture of the old and new which still can be seen. They are a fascinating visual demonstration of the problems and promise of the Mexico of 1993. They are arranged according to the cities we visited.

To obtain the slides, contact Andrea Byrum at Edgewood College, 855 Woodrow Street, Madison, WI 53711. (Addendum: Since the original release of this curriculum guide, slides 1, 3, 4-9, 29, 37, 39, 40 are no longer available.)

Mexico City:

Slide 1: The devastating effects of the 1985 earthquake can still occasionally be seen in Mexico today. The downtown area was one of the hardest hit. This slide shows a vacant lot across from Alameda Park where a damaged building has been razed. By many accounts, the Mexican people gained a new sense of self-reliance after seeing how they helped each other during and after the earthquake. Grass-roots movements are becoming more powerful in Mexico.

Slide 2: Near Alameda Park is the Plaza de Solidaridad, Solidarity Plaza, so named because after the earthquake Mexicans lived in tents here and felt a solidarity with each other. It is now used as an area of political protest. This slide shows a banner of the opposition political party PRD, the Democratic Revolutionary Party. Though it is difficult to see the words clearly, we can make out the Spanish word corrupta, so the party is protesting against corruption. Note the PRD's sun logo.

Slide 3: This is the Chamber of Deputies building, where the lower legislative house meets. It is a huge modern complex we visited. Note the Mexican flag and the national eagle emblem.

Slide 4: Slides 4 through 9 concern the three major political parties currently in Mexico. Slide 4 displays the mural on the outside of the PRI headquarters. Using revolutionary and indigenous motifs, it depicts Mexican history moving toward modernity.

Slide 5: This is another PRI building in the same complex. Note the PRI colors (the same as those of the national flag) and logo. The Spanish words mean "unity and work for triumph", fitting for this party that has dominated Mexican politics for the past sixty years.

Slide 6: We see here the conference room where a PRI representative discussed the party and the challenges it currently faces. PRI sees itself as the party bringing democratization, modernization, and reform to Mexico. They are now emphasizing more grass roots organization and better candidate selection to be able to compete in Mexico's changing political environment. Note on the wall the pictures of President Carlos Salinas.

Slide 7: This is the more modest headquarters of PAN, the conservative Party of National Action which has existed since 1939. Their goals are political democracy, the guarantee of basic rights for individuals, and reliance on the family and community for progress. With some PAN members now serving as state governors and the party's creditable showing in the 1988 presidential election, they are known as a highly organized and dedicated party which will be a strong opposition in the future.

Slides 8 and 9: These two posters were at the PRD headquarters we visited. Under the name FDN, this left-of-center coalition party surprised observers with its strong showing by candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in the '88 presidential elections. The poster in Slide 8 has the key words en campaña (meaning the party is "in the campaign") and democracia ya ("democracy now"). The photo is of the populist revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata. The poster in Slide 9 shows that Cárdenas will again be the party's presidential candidate for the '94 elections, and PRD is promising to wage a strong opposition to PRI.

Slide 10: This panorama shot symbolizes Mexico's various historical periods. The golden domes are of the old Guadalupe Basilica, Mexico's national religious shrine. The more modern, futuristic rooftop is the new Guadalupe Basilica, built when the old one was declared unsafe to visit. In the background, we see the even newer buildings that make up the Mexico City skyline today. This modern metropolis of approximately fifteen million people is itself a symbol of problems and promise.

Slide 11: This slide is evidence of the extended nuclear family still characteristic of Mexican society. This is a typical scene of a family outing to one of the churches on the grounds of the Guadalupe Basilica.

Slide 12: The famous Siqueiros Cultural Poliforum on South Insurgentes is a cultural center. The modernistic mosaic mural by the famous muralist Siqueiros depicts key Mexican images. In the summer of 93, a retrospective on the recently deceased actor Cantinflas was being presented here. We also learned during our stay that Mexican cinema is currently enjoying a resurgence, with such hits as Como agua para chocolate.

Slide 13: The famous library at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, though not new to the Mexican scene, is a reminder of the prominent role this university still plays in contemporary Mexican life: as a place for the country to discuss and research major issues. As an aside, of the 100 students going to elementary school, three go on to the university, which has a low graduation rate.

Slide 14: Another prominent though smaller university is the Iberoamerican University, a well-respected Jesuit institution. This building is part of the incredibly rapid construction of modern buildings going on in different areas of Mexico City. The university's original building was destroyed by an earthquake.

Slides 15, 16, 17: These slides show three contemporary constructions in Mexico City. Slide 15 is the Torre caballito ("the horse tower" or horselike figure), a modernistic sculpture prominently on display on the beautiful Reforma Avenue. Slide 16 is the Stock Exchange. Indicative of a strong economy, Mexican stocks have soared in value during the 1990's. Slide 17 is the huge Auditorio ("auditorium") at the other end of Reforma, where rock concerts and other huge public events are held.
[These slides were taken from photos found in magazines, since I realized after I got back that I had failed to take pictures of these important buildings.]

Slide 18: Mexico City has a fine, inexpensive system of public transit. The subway is the cheapest mode of transportation, but the microbús shown here costs a little more and is very efficient.

Slides 19 and 20: This day care center is an example of good social welfare spending by the Mexican government. Low income families must qualify to have their children attend, and there is a long waiting list. With 40% of the population under the age of fifteen, such centers are indispensable.

Slide 21: The Copilco subway station, in the southern part of Mexico City, is one of the most beautiful ones, with all its artistic murals. Copilco was originally an archaeological site. This slide shows the mixture of old and new, art and everyday life, typical of Mexico City.

Slides 22 and 23: The Lomas area to the west of downtown Mexico City is known for its affluence. The juxtaposition of rich and poor is seen in Slide 22 with a luxurious house and a laborer walking in front. Slide 23 is of modern high rise offices and condominiums in this area.

Slide 24: The striking contrast of rich and poor is demonstrated in this slide, with the poor dwelling in front where a family was living and the modern construction of office buildings in the background. Decreasing such disparity is one of Mexico's key challenges as it enters a new economic era.

Slide 25: Here we see the urban sprawl resulting from the heavy migration into Mexico City. Campesinos have flocked to the city seeking jobs at such a fast rate that basic services cannot keep pace.

Slides 26 and 27: The Fulbright group was fortunate to hear lectures by two of Mexico's most famous literary figures: Elena Poniatowska and José Agustín. They are shown in Slides 26 and 27. The former is known for her journalistic novels, like Nada, nadie about the 1985 earthquake. The latter is famous for his novels using popular language and his more recent historical chronicles entitled Tragicomedia mexicana which search for a Mexican identity in the midst of change. Poniatowska spoke to us of the difficulties of being a female writer in Mexico, and Agustín outlined twentieth-century Mexican literature as a reflection of Mexican society.

Tepoztlán:

Slides 28, 29, 30: These slides were taken in Tepoztlán, a beautiful town about an hour outside of Mexico City and an example of the movement by some Mexicans from the big cities to smaller towns. Some chilangos, people from Mexico City, have weekend houses there or have moved there. Slide 28 shows the beautiful mountainous landscape. Slide 29 exhibits a sign in a church about the shortage of priests in Mexico. The Spanish says "The priest of tomorrow depends today on you - Christ is counting on you." Slide 30 is a reminder of the satellite dishes one sees on the roofs of the more affluent homes.

Slides 31, 32: These slides are of Taxco, the famous silver mining town and tourist center. I overheard the youth in Slide 31 speaking an Indian dialect; many indigenous languages are still spoken in Mexico. This young boy is carrying on the fine craftsman tradition of his ancestors; he made a yarn bracelet for me in five minutes. Slide 32 displays the colorful wicker baskets and the young people who either sell them or accompany their parents who sell them.

Puebla:

Slides 33, 34: Puebla is the fourth largest city in Mexico, following Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey. Slide 33 is a typical scene one can still see any place in Mexico: the performance of an indigenous dance or ceremony in the main square of a major urban area. The indigenous population of Mexico is approximately 10% (according to anthropologists) or 5% (according to the '90 census). One of its challenges is to adapt to urban life without losing its unique culture. Slide 34 is the other side of the coin: a modern house in a wealthy neighborhood. Puebla increased in population when some Mexicans fled from Mexico City after the 1985 earthquake. Puebla itself is a mixture of old and new, with its colonial past and its affluent industrial base.

Oaxaca:

Slides 35, 36: Oaxaca represents Mexico's southern region, one of the three geographical regions of the country. It has a high concentration of indigenous and agricultural population. Though an economically depressed area, it is quite beautiful with its genteel main square and outdoor cafes, its lively marketplaces and distinctive black pottery, and the ruins of Mitla and Monte Albán. Slides 35 and 36 are of the world-famous Guelaguetza festival, which occurs every year at the end of July. The seven ethnic regions of southern Mexico come to Oaxaca in their native dress and perform their particular dance. As the slides demonstrate, it is a pageantry of sound and color and testimony to the rich and proud tradition still thriving in southern Mexico.

Slide 37: On display in a shop window in Oaxaca was this sign urging Mexicans to get their photo identification card, which the government claims will insure a fairer electoral process.

Slides 38, 39, 40: An example of a small southern village is this one, a short trip from Oaxaca. I believe it is called Teotihuacán del Valle. Slide 38 shows the dirt roads still found in most villages. Slide 39 is an example of the government's highly publicized and well funded social welfare program called Solidarity/Solidaridad. It supports local boot-strap projects of job creation, health care, education, and food distribution. We see in this slide a store built with such funds. Slide 40 shows the fanciful wooden figures made famous by the crafts people of this village. This woman and others in the village sell the figures out of their homes. Many Mexicans continue to make a living off of such sales.

Zacatecas:

Slides 41,42, 43: These three slides are of Zacatecas, a picturesque mining town we visited in north central Mexico. Slide 41 shows the beautiful panorama with the city's renowned pink-stone colonial buildings and the wealth once brought by the mines. One citizen told me that today the miners earn a little more than minimum wage (minimum wage in Mexico is approximately $8 U.S. dollars per day). Slide 42 is another sign of the vibrant indigenous tradition as these beautifully arrayed dancers performed outside the Museum of the Revolution--a seemingly incongruous combination typical of Mexico. Slide 43 is a fitting conclusion, showing a modern Mexican family standing in front of a statue of revolutionary hero Pancho Villa. It will be interesting to see what roles the Mexican family and society play as the country continues its unique revolutionary path into the 21st century.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography provides resources for instructors and students who want to pursue a particular topic of interest.

Bartra, Roger. The Cage of Melancholy: Identity and Metamorphosis in the Mexican Character. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

Cornelius, Wayne A., and Ann Craig. The Mexican Political System in Transition. Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies. San Diego: University of California Press, 1991.

Cornelius, Wayne A., et al. Mexico's Alternative Political Futures. Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies. San Diego: University of California Press, 1989.

Fuentes, Carlos. Buried Mirror. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992.

Kandell, Johnathon. La Capital: the Bibliography of Mexico City. New York: Random House, 1988.

Meyer, Michael C. The Course of Mexican History. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Monsiváis, Carlos. Entrada libre: crónica de una sociedad que se organiza. Mexico: Biblioteca era, 1987.

Paz, Octavio. The Labyrinth of Solitude. New York: Grove, 1985.

Riding, Alan. Distant Neighbor. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985.

Roett, Riordan. Political and Economic Liberalization in Mexico: At a Critical Juncture? Boulder/London: Lynne Rienner, 1993.

Sandoval, Rodolpho. "The U.S./Mexico Free Trade Agreement and the Resolution of Commercial Trade Disputes." The Southern Law Journal 53 (1993).

Magazines recommended to me in Mexico: Nexos & Vuelta (cultural mags.); Proceso (political); and Voices of Mexico (from El Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte at UNAM; political/cultural).

NOTES

---

[1] In this paragraph, the information on the opposition parties' views on Nafta came from our visits to each party's headquarters in Mexico City. The geopolitical interpretation, along with other views of Nafta, were presented in a Fulbright Seminar lecture by journalist/researcher Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, in Mexico City, July 1993.

[2] In our visit to the Ministry of Trade and Industrial Promotion, in Mexico City, a government representative whose name I did not get expressed the view that certain economic groups of Mexicans will be hurt by Nafta but that the country will be stronger if it learns to compete.

[3] Examples of U.S. analysts asking such key political questions are Riordan Roett, in Political and Economic Liberalization in Mexico (Boulder/London: Lynne Rienner Publ., 1993) and those in the anthology Mexico's Alternative Political Futures, edited by Wayne A. Cornelius, Judith Gentleman, and Peter Smith (San Diego: Univ. of California Press, 1989).

[4] Factual information regarding the construction of Mexico's political system and the term "two pillars" found later in the text to describe PRI and the president come from a Fulbright Seminar lecture by political scientist Arturo Sánchez Gutiérrez, July 1993, in Mexico City.

[5] For example, see "Overview: The Dynamics of Political Change in Mexico", by Wayne A. Cornelius, Judith Gentleman, and Peter H. Smith, in Mexico's Alternative Political Futures, p. 20.

[6] While most of the information in this paragraph can be found in various sources, it is nicely summarized by Wayne A. Cornelius and Ann L. Craig in The Mexican Political System in Transition (San Diego: Univ. of California Press, 1991) 1-2.

[7] Our Fullbright group met at PRI headquarters with Roberta Lajous, of the party's International Affairs Bureau, in Mexico City, July 1993.

[8] As this curriculum project went to publication, PRI officially announced that the next PRI candidate for president will be Luis Donaldo Colosio. A former party chairman and elected official, he is now closely identified with public works and especially the Solidarity Program for social welfare.

[9] In this section, the information on the history of church and state relations and on the new articles in the constitution comes from a Fulbright Seminar lecture by Professor Carlos Garma, July 1993, in Mexico City.

[10] Almost all of the information in my section on literature comes from a Fulbright Seminar lecture given by writer José Agustín, July 1993, in Tepoztlán.